



# **Report** **North Falmouth Library** **Improvements Project** Falmouth, Massachusetts

## *Archaeological Assessment*

*December 2016*

Submitted to:

**Town of Falmouth**

Falmouth Public Library

300 Main Street

Falmouth, MA 02540

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PAL has completed an archaeological assessment for the Falmouth Public Library, on behalf of the Town, as part of a proposed project to improve the North Falmouth Branch Library located on Chester Street in North Falmouth, Massachusetts (Figure 1). The Library received a Planning and Design grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners to begin planning for a renovated, expanded, or new library on the current site of the North Falmouth Branch Library. The Library is located within an approximately 9-acre parcel of land designated as Francis A. Nye Memorial Park (Nye Park) that includes the current library building, sports courts and fields, and a small playground in addition to a gravel and dirt parking lot (Figure 2). The redevelopment plans may include impacts within an approximately 45,000 square foot area, although the specific impact areas have not yet been identified.

The Nye Park parcel also contains an Indian Burial Ground, recorded in the Massachusetts Historical Commission's (MHC) *Inventory of the Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth* (MHC Inventory) as FAL-HA-2.

The Falmouth Planning Board will be reviewing the proposed redevelopment and has requested that archaeological investigations be undertaken to avoid any impacts to the burial ground. Because no specific impact areas have yet been defined, PAL has completed an archaeological sensitivity assessment. The goal of the assessment was to collect any available archival information or informant information about the location and extent of the burial ground, conduct a walkover survey of the parcel to look for surficial evidence of the burial ground, and prepare a report detailing the results of the assessment as well as maps indicating the likely location and extent of the burial ground. The report will also include a scope of work for the archaeological delineation of the burial ground, which would be completed once project impact areas have been identified. The results of the research and fieldwork were used to determine the likelihood that potentially significant archaeological resources, including but not limited to unmarked burials, may be present within potential project areas, and to make recommendations regarding the need for and scope of additional archaeological investigations.

## **Study Area Description**

The approximately 9-acre Nye Park parcel is bounded by County Road and Chester Street on the north/northeast, Cedar Lake (sometimes referred to as Flax Pond in historical sources) on the west, and woodland on the southeast and northwest. The parcel includes the existing North Falmouth Library building with a dirt/gravel parking lot, a playground, a ball field, and four tennis courts (see Figure 2). Woods surround the open and developed area on the north and south; commercial/institutional and residential structures line Chester Street and County/Old Main roads. A detailed discussion of existing conditions is presented below.

For purposes of the archaeological assessment, information was collected for the entire park area and its immediate vicinity. The potential area of impacts as part of the library improvements project is not currently defined, but would likely be focused in the northeastern portion of the Park in the area of the existing library building and parking lot.

## **Results of the Research Review and Informant Interviews**

The background research involved a review of the MHC's archaeological site and inventory files; the collection of available local documentary information about the burial ground and the land use history and creation of Nye Park; and interviews with knowledgeable local historians and tribal historic preservation staff. Information was collected from the Falmouth Public Library, the Town of Falmouth Planning and Historic Commission offices, and through phone conversations and emails with informants.

The review of the MHC's inventory indicates that the current library building (FAL.1718) is identified as a Modern Period structure within the Megansett Local Historic District (FAL.L). The MHC archaeological site form for the Indian Burial Ground (FAL-HA-02) includes a number of attachments, primarily pages from local historical sources that reference the burial ground; these sources were also identified as part of the local research and informant interviews (see below). In addition, the pre-contact Native American Cedar Lake (19-BN-793) archaeological site was recorded as part of the Falmouth community-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey (Donta et al. 1996) with a general location around the shores and terraces surrounding Cedar Lake. The site form indicates avocational archaeologists and local residents have collected artifacts and pottery indicative of the Middle Archaic through Late Woodland periods (8,000-450 years before present [B.P.]).

The original MHC site form for the Indian Burial Ground (FAL-HA-02) was completed by William Dunkle, who was a member of the Falmouth historical Commission and author of a bicentennial history of North Falmouth (Dunkle 1975). Dunkle's information on the site form notes that the construction of two of the tennis courts "cut into the Indian Burial Area" but there is no additional information to indicate when the construction happened or if any human remains were exposed.

The site form also contains a single page photocopy of a 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet; the full citation for this document is not included on the site form but historian Jean McCluskey identified it as an 1887 commemorative booklet (Town of Falmouth 1887). The booklet contains an 1886 speech by General John L. Swift, who spoke as part of Falmouth's bicentennial celebration. Referring to the current area of Nye Park, Swift said:

In North Falmouth, on lands bought 200 years ago from the heirs of Governor Bradford, and now in the possession of the Hon. Francis A. Nye, bounded by a lake, there is a picturesque elevation that from time immemorial has been the burial-place of Indians. There can now be seen upon this interesting spot more than 100 stones of the field which mark rude graves. Once, by permission of the authorities, a son of Arthur Tappan of New York, residing here, was allowed an examination of one of these interments, to discover if any relics could there be found. Nothing of the traditional accompaniments was revealed; but this place has been piously guarded by all owners and every generation out of respect ..." (Town of Falmouth 1887:47).

The reference is important, because it indicates that in 1886 there were approximately 100 stones visible within the burial ground, and this reference is likely the original source for later accounts of the number of gravestones within the cemetery.

Numerous twentieth century local histories and commemorative reports (e.g. Dunkle 1975; Smith 1986; Walton 1925) reference the presence of an Indian burial ground on the park property. Most of these reference the presence of 100 graves (probably from the 1886 speech) and also describe the events surrounding the creation of Nye Park. Information on the history of land ownership for the parcel as well as the Park's dedication was also collected from local historians Ray Hayes and Jean McCluskey, who conducted extensive local archive research and have presented that research in a recently completed report (Hayes 2016). Dr. Hayes and Ms. McCluskey were also contacted directly by Senior Archaeologist Holly Herbster as part of the PAL project.

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Deputy Historic Preservation Officer David Weeden was also contacted as part of the project for information about the burial ground. Mr. Weeden indicated that his office did not contain any documentary records describing the cemetery and that he would solicit information from any tribal members or elders who may have knowledge about the location.

Dr. Hayes and Ms. McCluskey conducted extensive research in town records, at the Falmouth Historical Society and Woods Hole Museum Archives, newspaper archives, and other local sources in order to reconstruct the land use history of the park parcel. The information presented in their report and cited below provided additional documentation about the burial ground. Their research indicates that the original land transfer to Plymouth Colony occurred in 1655 when the entire North Falmouth area was deeded by Native American representatives. In 1689, an area of approximately 300 acres was transferred by the Colony to Benjamin Nye of Sandwich (Hayes 2016:28). Nye's landholdings in the Sandwich/Falmouth area were extensive so these deeds do not specifically mention the area around Cedar Lake. In 1862 John and Ebenezer Nye acquired title to Benjamin Nye's land originally known as "Mahagansett" so likely the area of present-day north Falmouth that includes the study area. This land passed through the Nye family and eventually became part of the landholdings of Francis Nye and his son Francis Augustus Nye.

Numerous sources (including the MHC site form) cite Francis Nye, Sr. (father of Francis A. Nye) as an eyewitness who knew the locations of burials within the cemetery and was alive while the cemetery was still in use for interment. As noted when the Park was dedicated in 1924, Francis Sr. had pointed out the "place where the last Indian was buried" to his son Francis A. Nye. Francis Sr. died in 1857 so presumably his observation of a Native American burial occurred sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Based on the above descriptions of “stones of the field” and examples of other Native American burial grounds in southeastern Massachusetts and on Cape Cod, these 100 markers could have been unmodified/natural fieldstones, roughly shaped but otherwise unmarked fieldstones, and/or carved stones. There is no description of the arrangement of the stones, which may have been visible in organized rows or clusters or may have appeared as randomly placed across the knoll.

In two deeds dated 1916 and 1917, Herbert F. and Mary A. Nye, children of Francis Augustus, transferred an approximately 3.25-acre and an approximately 5.75-acre parcel to the Town of Falmouth for the perpetual use of the land as a public park or playground, to be maintained by the Francis A. Nye Park Association under the supervision of the town’s Park Commissioners (Hayes 2016). Dr. Hayes provided copies of both deeds as well as the accompanying survey plans. The burial ground, which is located on the larger parcel, is not referenced in either the deed or on the plan. A 1918 letter to the Town from the Nye estate executor Rufus B. Tobey accompanying the 1917 transfer states, “The heirs of the late Francis A. Nye now desire to add further land and the Indian burying ground connected therewith to the town under the same conditions as the previous gift. Unusual interest was excited when it was learned that, though overgrown with brush, the Indian burial ground would be cleared up and thrown open for the inspection of visitors.” (cited in Hayes 2016:2-3). Dr. Hayes reported that in his research through newspaper accounts of the park’s opening, reference was made to workmen clearing away the vegetation within the burial ground area and that the clearing most likely included removal (either intentional or inadvertent) of the “stones of the field.” Whether the stones were randomly discarded or removed to a pile or other location is unknown. A 1925 published history of Falmouth includes a photograph taken at Cedar Pond and depicting the area of the burial ground; although taken from a distance to the north, a cleared area on the hilltop is visible in the upper left portion of the photo and likely was taken in the general time frame when the site was first cleared (Photo 1).

The burial ground is marked today by an inscribed marble marker (dated 1924) and marble boundary stones (see discussion below). Town records indicate that in December 1924 payments were made to surveyor William A. Gifford, who placed the stones, and to George R. Sands and Son, who supplied the materials and likely carved the inscriptions (Ray Hayes, personal communication 2016).

Dr. Hayes’ field survey of the burial ground identified seven low (10-20 centimeters [cm] above the ground surface) stone boundary markers each measuring approximately 20 cm square with an obelisk-shaped point on top, including one with the letters “RP” (reference point) and an arrow (see below). The stones form a rough one-acre square measuring approximately 196 feet (60 meters [m]) by 214 feet (65 m). The markers encompass the cleared flat hilltop terrace but also extend down the steep slope to the Cedar Pond shoreline. According to Dr. Hayes, the boundaries may have been set to represent “God’s Acre”, a term used to describe the burial ground by William Rich, president of the Memorial Park Association, at a dedication of the park on July 4, 1917 (Hayes 2016).

The research included a review of historical maps of the Megansett area to see if the location and/or boundaries of the burial ground was referenced at any point in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries. Maps and atlases dating from 1775 to 1880 referenced in the Falmouth community-wide survey report (Donta et al 1996) and in the Hayes (2016) report as well as additional nineteenth century topographic and coastal survey plans (e.g. USCG 1860) were examined but none depict the burial ground on the east side of Cedar Pond. As noted by Hayes (2016:17), the 1845 (Boyce) coastal survey map shows the general area of the burial ground as a wooded parcel that is distinctive because it is surrounded by open land and defined residential lots. William Dunkle (1975:11) provided a

sketch map of Megansett showing the burial ground and other historical properties in his 1975 bicentennial book, but it appears to correspond to the area marked by the 1920s boundary posts.

### **Results of the Walkover Survey**

PAL Senior Archaeologist Holly Herbster completed a walkover survey of the study area on November 16, 2016 with Falmouth Library Acting Director Linda Collins. The walkover survey included an examination of the open level terrace with commemorative marker, the slopes and base surrounding the terrace, the existing library building, and the surrounding sections of Nye Park. GPS points were collected for visible burial ground elements and digital photos were taken to document existing conditions.

The majority of Nye Park (excluding the ball field at the southern end) is categorized as Carver Coarse Sand with 8 to 15 percent slopes (USDA 1993). The identified burial ground sits on a broad, level terrace at an elevation of approximately 40 feet above sea level southwest of the library building between the parking lot and Cedar Lake (Photo 2; see Figure 2). A carved marble marker sits in the center of an open grassy area with scattered maturing trees (Photo 3). The marker, which is set in a cement base, reads:

INDIAN  
CEMETERY

Erected by the Park Commissioners  
Of the Town of Falmouth

1924

The burial ground is also demarcated by a series of low stone posts that mark out the general area (Photo 3). Four of the posts were visible during the PAL walkover survey (see Figure 2), however there are seven markers that have been observed and mapped by Ray Hayes (Hayes 2016) (Photo 4). The markers encompass the level terrace but also extend down the steep slope to its base near the pond shoreline (see discussion above). No stones, visible depressions, or other surficial signs of graves are visible on the open ground surface nor in the surrounding wooded areas at the same level elevation. The slope down to Cedar Pond is steep and several eroding dirt foot paths line the slopes as the base of the hill. No evidence of burial-related features was noted on the slope and it is unlikely that the steep slopes were used for burial. Other than compaction from foot traffic along the paths, there is no evidence of modern/recent ground disturbance around the hillside.

The tennis courts immediately south of the open terrace are separated from the burial ground by an earthen berm that drops approximately 4-5 feet to the tennis courts below (Photo 5). Based on the grade change and the level condition of the courts themselves, it appears that the burial ground area, if it extended in this direction, was likely destroyed prior to or during the construction of the courts.

The parking lot that borders the open terrace on the east sits at exactly the same level elevation and extends to the back of the library building, which is also at the approximate same elevation (Photo 6). The only demarcation of the burial ground along this border is the transition from grass to gravel/dirt, the presence of at least two boundary markers, and a modern wooden guardrail (see Photo 1).

The present North Falmouth Library building was moved to the site in the mid-1960s when a barracks building was transferred from the nearby Otis Air Force Base to function as a community center. The building has been used as a library since 1996 (Hayes 2016). The structure is set on a cement slab and although there was almost certainly some excavation to level the base for the pad and install underground utilities, there does not appear to be extensive disturbance around the building itself and the ground surface appears to follow a natural gentle contour slightly lowering towards Chester Road (Photo 7). There is a second parking area adjacent to Chester Road in the front of the library building; this area appears to have been cut down/graded from the natural gentle slope.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The combined results of the background research, informant interviews, and walkover survey were used to compile the preliminary archaeological sensitivity assessment map presented as Figure 3.

The background research and MHC file review provides consistent and long-term documentation for the presence of a Native American burial ground on the terrace above Cedar Pond. In addition to eyewitness accounts of grave markers and interments, generations of Nye family members knew of the existence of the burial ground and did not disturb the area.

The presence of at least one recorded archaeological site generally known through artifact collections around the Cedar Pond shoreline documents the use of the area by Native Americans over a period that could span more than 8,00 years. The environmental setting of the study area on a broad elevated terrace above fresh and salt water sources, the presence of sandy well-drained soils, and the existence of overland access routes to the coast and interior all contribute to the sensitivity of undisturbed portions of the study area as likely locations for pre-contact period archaeological deposits, including artifacts and features.

The natural and likely undisturbed wooded areas to the north of the open terrace, and any undisturbed areas surrounding the library complex, could contain evidence of pre-contact period archaeological sites including (but not limited to) chipped and ground stone tools and tool fragments, pottery, animal and marine remains, and cultural features including storage and trash pits or shell middens. Deposits like this have been identified in nearly identical environmental settings throughout Falmouth and Cape Cod. These areas have been assessed as having a high archaeological sensitivity.

It is possible the study area may have been used as a burial place in the ancient past, and that the elevated terrace continued to be used by Mashpee Indians up to the nineteenth century as witnessed by Francis Nye Sr. The burial ground boundaries established by the Town in 1924 were likely designed to encompass stone grave markers that were visible at that time, but the boundary markers clearly extended beyond visible grave stones to encompass a one-acre area and possibly provide a protective buffer around the site. Given the eyewitness descriptions of unmarked and possibly unmodified fieldstone markers, it is likely that some grave markers were not highly visible or were mistaken for naturally deposited stones. It is also very likely that if the site was used as a burial place in the ancient past, no aboveground markers were present in the eighteenth century (or earlier). Many identified Native American burial grounds in southeastern Massachusetts (including those dating to the nineteenth century) are not bounded like typical EuroAmerican cemeteries, nor are all individual burials demarcated by stones. These factors, combined with the removal of the visible grave markers from the Indian Burial Ground in the 1920s as part of the clearing effort, provide ample information

that the burial ground may extend beyond the 1924 bounded area. If present, additional burials would most likely be located to the north and east of the open terrace, where the same general elevation extends and there is little documented below ground disturbance.

It is unlikely that intact burials would extend along the steep slope leading down to Cedar Pond, although it is possible that erosion and natural processes could have moved materials and/or remains from the top of the terrace down the slope. It is also unlikely that intact burials (if once present) remain under the tennis courts, based on the steep and artificial cut and grade change in this area.

Areas of moderate sensitivity are identified as those outside the bounded burial ground where there does not appear to be significant ground disturbance (e.g. wooded areas) or where the degree of previous ground disturbance is not known. The current library parking lot and grassy yard areas surrounding the library building sit at the same general elevation as the burial ground terrace and while some degree of topsoil stripping/disturbance has occurred, it is possible that undisturbed/natural soil deposits are present in these areas. If natural/undisturbed soils are present, they could contain pre-contact period archaeological deposits associated with habitation and/or activity areas in addition to unmarked burials.

Figure 3 represents a preliminary sensitivity assessment based on information collected to date, and is designed to assist the Town with initial considerations of the use of the Nye Park area for library improvements, and to facilitate ongoing consultation with the Massachusetts Historic Commission and the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. PAL recommends that no ground disturbing activities be proposed for the areas currently demarcated as the approximately one-acre Indian Burial Ground. While these boundaries may not include all graves located within the cemetery, they likely encompass many of the 100 graves seen by eyewitnesses and offer a protective buffer along the west and north sides of the open terrace.

**PAL recommends that once areas of potential ground disturbance are identified as part of project planning, an intensive (locational) archaeological survey be conducted within areas of moderate or high sensitivity in order to locate and identify any potentially significant archaeological deposits associated with pre-contact period land use.** The intensive survey would involve the hand excavation of 50-x-50 cm shovel test pits at regular intervals across archaeologically sensitive portions of the project area. The survey, which must be conducted under an archaeological permit issued by the State Archaeologist's office at the MHC, would also be designed to identify and document areas where ground disturbance has occurred in the past, especially in areas surrounding the library building. The results of the intensive survey would be used to help determine which portions of the project area are most likely to contain unmarked burials and/or significant pre-contact archaeological sites, so that these areas could be avoided, if possible, as part of any improvements.

The intensive survey methodology is not designed to locate and identify unmarked burial features. **The only way to insure that any unmarked burials are identified is to systematically remove the topsoil with machine-assisted archaeological monitoring across 100 percent of planned impact areas following the completion of any archaeological hand-testing.** The machine stripping is designed to expose features as soon as they become visible in the subsoil matrix, but not to impact them. The purpose of this activity will be to ensure the identification of all cultural features that may be present, including any potential human burials. If cultural features are present they should be clearly visible in the subsoil matrix. As with the intensive survey, the results of the machine stripping

would be designed to provide the Town with locational information so that impacts to significant archaeological deposits and/or unmarked burials can be avoided.

PAL can prepare a scope of work and cost proposal for an intensive survey as requested by the Town, and in conjunction with review of this report by the MHC and Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe.

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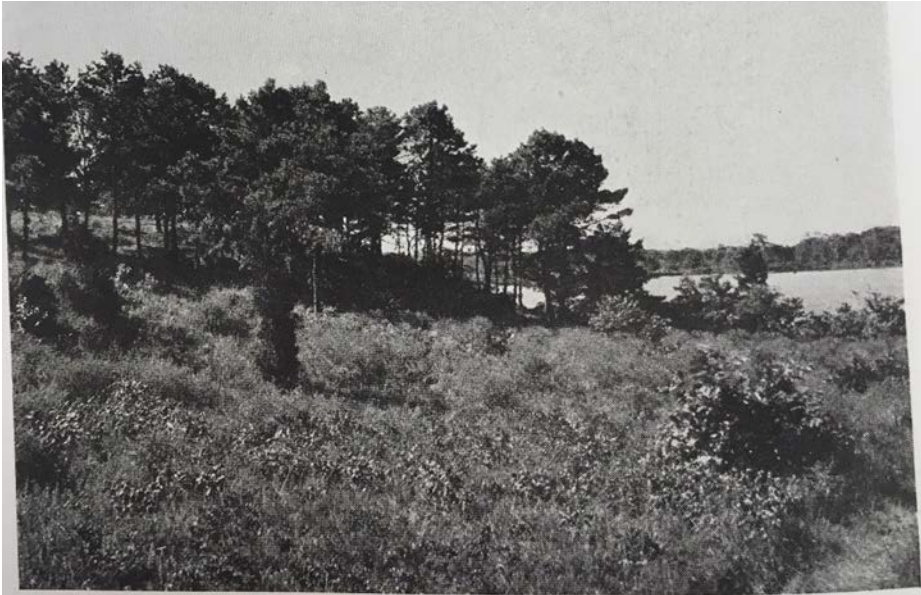
**Informants**

Ray Hayes, marine archaeologist and historian, Woods Hole, MA

Jean McCluskey, former Falmouth Historical Commission member and historian, Falmouth MA

Corey Pacheco, Town of Falmouth Planning Department, Falmouth MA

David Weeden, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Deputy THPO, Mashpee MA



CEDAR POND AT MEGANSETT

*The eastern shore, tradition says, was once an Indian burying-ground.*

**Photo 1.** View south towards the Indian Burial Ground (upper left) (Walton Staff 1925:8).



**Photo 2.** View southwest of open burial ground area from library parking lot with wooden guardrail demarking cemetery edge. Marble marker in center of clearing, sloping hillside visible (PAL 2016).



**Photos 3 and 4.** Commemorative marble burial ground marker (L), view northwest and marble boundary stone (R) at base of slope (PAL 2016).



**Photo 5.** View southwest along southern edge of terrace, showing berm and grade change to tennis courts (PAL 2016).



**Photo 6.** View from southeast corner of burial ground terrace showing parking lot and library building (PAL 2016).



**Photo 7.** View south from library access road off Chester Street showing library and parking lot (PAL 2016).



**Figure 1. Location of the North Falmouth Library study area on the Pocasset MA, USGS quadrangle, 7.5 minute series.**



Figure 2. Aerial plan of the North Falmouth Library study area showing Nye Park, existing conditions, and Burial Ground.

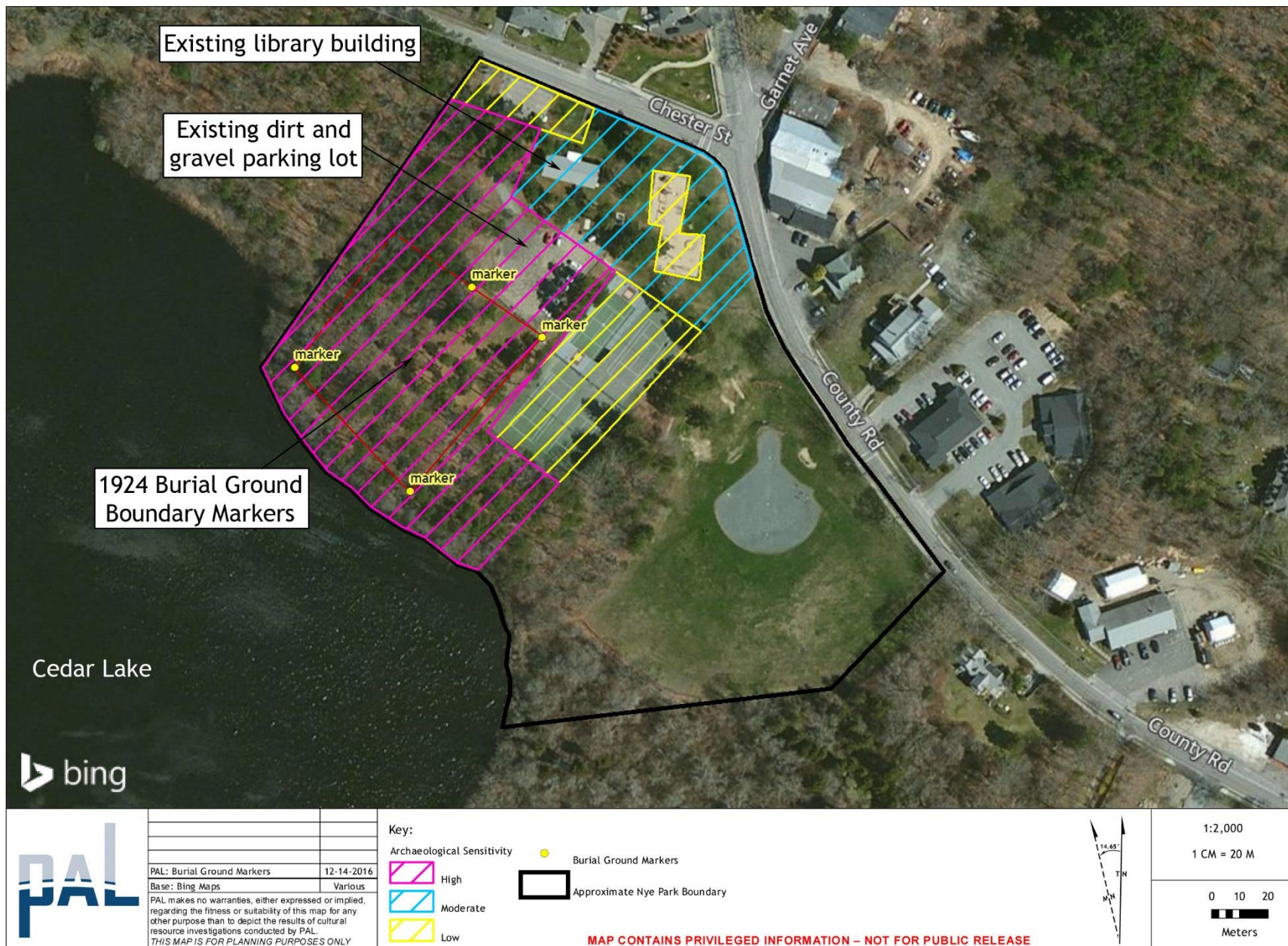


Figure 3. Preliminary archaeological sensitivity assessment for the North Falmouth Library studyarea.